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ABSTRACT

This text of a statement presented at U.S. Senate hearings on child care and development describes the operations of the Childcare Switchboard and other programs providing child care information and referral services and urges public financial support for statewide and national information and referral networks. The goal of the Childcare Switchboard, a private foundation-supported agency, has been to make available to parents (at all income levels) up-to-date information about the full range of child care services in San Francisco and to provide better utilization of available public and private child care openings, with emphasis on parent choice. The Switchboard has made over 15,000 child care referrals in its 5 years of operation. It also offers information on other services for parents including health, legal and welfare counseling. For child care providers, the Switchboard offers training seminars, monthly forums, a bi-monthly newsletter, a toy center and other services. For legislative and social policy planners, services such as the Childcare Switchboard can make available a steady flow of information on child care issues to help avoid the crisis orientation currently common in child care decision-making. Such services could provide a significant body of comparative data, including specific demographic and geographic information. Results of a client-followup survey ("What happens to people who cannot find child care?") are appended. (BF)

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The Role of Information and Referral Programs in Child Care

Presented by: Patricia Siegel, Director
Childcare Switchboard
San Francisco

Presented for: Senator Alan Cranston, Chairman
Subcommittee on Child and Human Development

Presented on: November 25, 1977
Hearings on Child Care and Child Development,
San Francisco

Senator Cranston, and members of the Subcommittee on Child and Human Development:

Thank you for your attention and focus on comprehensive child care legislation. I am happy to share with you today the history and role of the Childcare Switchboard and other information and referral programs in California.

I am the director of the Childcare Switchboard, a private non-profit agency founded in 1972 to provide comprehensive information and referral services to parents seeking child care and child related services. As the parent of three young children and the organizer of a neighborhood-based "Playgroup" I was aware of the often painful difficulty and anxiety experienced by parents looking for child care arrangements that truly met their needs. Although information and referral services are a universally mandated social service under Title XX, little specific data on the diverse and available child care services is maintained or disseminated by most county welfare departments. The hunt-a.d-peck method of finding child care costs parents and children precious time, energy, and adjustment. Our goal is to make avail-

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able to parents up-dated information about the full range of child care services available in San Francisco and to provide better utilization of child care slots available in public and private programs. Our service emphasis has always had a strong focus and support for parental choice in choosing child care. Making the child care choice which best meets a family's needs requires updated information on the full range and availability of child care services in the community. Gathering and maintaining this information, which includes both formal and informal types of care, and referring it to the community is the core of Childcare Switchboard service.

Our files include full, part time and occasional programs. We refer to occasional babysitters (interviewed by our staff), family day care homes, parent cooperatives, Headstart, public and private centers. We make "informational" visits to the child care programs in our files. These visits help us to better describe available services to parents who phone us or drop in our office.

When parents phone us they describe their child care needs and preferences. Our child care counselors then attempt to offer them alternatives which meet their needs and financial means. This is a challenging, often frustrating task given the tremendous need for more low-cost quality child care services in San Francisco. An average call lasts 10 minutes, and may include a discussion on what to look for when visiting a home or center. It is important for parents to be aware of the kinds of questions they can ask and what their rights and responsibilities are when making child care

arrangements.

Our office is located in a second floor flat in the heart of Noe Valley, a distinct San Francisco neighborhood. The atmosphere is casual and relaxed, and there is a special play area for the children who often accompany their parents to our office. Our office represents a comfortable place for parents....a place to get free information and help with no strings and no value judgments made. Our bilingual services are available to all parents, from all income ranges and to all types of families.

Over the past five years we have made over 15,000 child care referrals. We also maintain information about other important services of interest to families such as available health, legal, and counseling services. We offer welfare counseling, and maintain a shared housing file for families with children. We do not see child care as an isolated need; our experience has shown that it often comes hand in hand with other social service needs.

One important part of our effort to address those needs is our Single Parent Resource Center. This component offers regularly scheduled peer support groups, peer counseling, referrals and workshops for single parents.

Child care information and referral programs create a network of parents and child care providers. In the course of contacting, visiting and up-dating provider files we become aware of provider needs; we try to develop resources to help meet these needs. For example, we offer seminar-training for family day care providers, and a monthly discussion forum for child care program directors.

Our Toy Center offers toys and equipment for loan, at-cost supplies, recyclable items for toy making, workshops for family day care providers and small child care groups.

Child care information and referral programs are extremely useful to new providers who need information on local and state regulations, funding sources, and program development. In addition to providing this information and technical assistance, we are able to give prospective providers a perspective on unmet child care needs by area-neighborhood. The availability of such information helps to avoid duplication or saturation of service.

Planning, coordination, and advocacy all evolve naturally when the above mentioned services to parents and providers are offered by a child care information and referral program. Our bi-monthly newsletter"Children's News-Advocate"is an updated, on-going source of news and information to all those who use our services. It includes information about current policy issues, child care openings plus events and articles of issue and concern to parents.

Child care information and referral programs can document child care needs and give a public voice to needs which might otherwise go unheard. One of the most serious constraints upon effective legislative decision-making is lack of information relevent to the issue under consideration. Preparation and passage of responsible legislation for social services requires current, accurate data about the needs, costs and consumer preferences for such services. Legislation concerning child care programs and support systems is no exception. It requires not only descriptive statistics which

document the need for child care in various communities, but it also necessitates information about what services are already available (or not available), cost concerns of consumers and providers of childcare, and parental preferences for particular kinds of child care services.

Traditionally, these kinds of information are collected by social researchers whose "needs assessment" surveys are conducted on a "one-shot-deal" basis. In other words, the data is gathered from a selected sample of parents and/or child care providers at a particular point in time. Such information may therefore be valid for the time the survey is conducted, but it also may be stale or inaccurate when the legislation is prepared and approved.

One way to avoid this problem is to make available to legislators and social policy planners a steady flow of information about child care issues. Such issues include:

1. Documentation of need for childcare services within a given community.
2. Information about consumer concerns/preferences in child care services.
3. Information on special issues relative to child care services (e.g., lack of infant care and after school services).
4. Data regarding trends in child care issues over time (e.g., child care needs of single parents or general need for summer child care programs).

A "steady flow" of such information to legislators, government policy makers, child care providers and community groups helps to deter the crisis orientation of current child care decision making. It also assists in long-range planning for child care services, public policy considerations in child care and preparation of

regulations and standards for childcare programs.

Such important information is currently available from the Childcare Switchboard and could be available from other child care information and referral services located in diversified areas of the state and nation. It is solicited from the hundreds of parents who phone or drop-in to our agency requesting child care. Our information and referral counselors and the child care service files which they maintain are excellent sources of information about need for and availability of child care services. Currently, the Childcare Switchboard is able to gather data on the need for child care which is specific to:

1. Age of children
2. Type of child care needed by kind of service and time needs.
3. Measures of what parents say they can afford to pay for full time child care.
4. Availability and cost of child care services.
5. Lack of services for particular groups of children (e.g. infants or physically and developmentally disabled children).
6. Residence neighborhood of child care consumers.
7. Parental preference for specific types of child care services related to age of child, time needs, etc.
8. Reason needing child care.

This type of data (see attached February, 1977 Report) is useful in depicting any trends in child care needs such as seasonal fluctuations (summer, back-to-school months,etc.), problems with maximum enrollment in child care programs, changes in numbers of services available and fees charged for such services, and changes in parental need for certain types of child care (e.g., the increased need for infant care or the desire for particular educational or ethnic components in childcare services.

Other important types of data which can be available from

information and referral agencies are those which help to assess whether parents are successful in locating child care and if they are not successful, what impact this can have on their lives and the lives of their children. Such data is gathered from follow-up contact with parents who phone information and referral agencies for child care referrals. By re-calling these people through this follow-up procedure, it is possible to document:

1. If their child care need was met, and if so, through what kinds of service .
2. If they were able to locate the type of child care which they preferred.
3. If they are satisfied with their child care arrangements.
4. How much they are actually paying for full time childcare.
5. Why they are unable to find child care.
6. How they are caring for their children if a child care service was not available.

Parents' responses to the above concerns which have been documented by the Childcare Switchboard follow-up staff show consistently that when parents do not find child care they are placed in a situati which brings rapid and often debilitating changes to their lives. Some parents have been forced to discontinue educational or training programs, to change jobs and to change residence because their child care needs were unmet. These responses are documented in the attached November, 1976 report, "What Happens to People Who Cannot Find Child Care."

It is the belief of child care consumers, providers and advocate that legislators should have the information outlined in this testimony available to them when preparing child care legislation. With adequate staff, such data can be available from a network of child care information and referral agencies throughout the state and nation. If located in diversified ethnic, rural-suburban-urban communities child care information and referral groups can provide data specific to the child care needs and desires of their particular

demographic and geographic areas. Such comparative data would sensitize law and policy makers to the varied needs of different groups of child care consumers and providers. The results would hopefully be responsible and responsive child care legislation.

The Childcare Switchboard has developed the services described over a five year period. Financial support for the first two years came from local foundations, Rosenberg and the San Francisco Foundation. In May, 1975 the Ford Foundation sponsored a mini child care information and referral conference in New York. Twelve groups from across the country, all of whom were providing child care information and referral services, were invited to this three day meeting at Bank Street College. Three California groups were represented, the Childcare Switchboard, San Francisco; Bananas, A Place to Find Playmates, Berkeley; and the Child Care Information Service, Pasadena. An informal national network evolved from the conference, and in October 1975 the Ford Foundation made its first child care information and referral grant to the Childcare Switchboard. This grant has been renewed for a second and third year. In 1976, Ford made a second grant to the Cambridge Child Care Resou Center.

Our funding, and funding for all child care information and referral services will be short-term and precarious without ultima public support. CETA funds have been successfully used to provide some staffing in our own, and other agencies, but the availability and continuing nature of CETA funds is uncertain. The Ford Founda tion has encouraged the Childcare Switchboard to develop local, st and federal sources of on-going funds. In 1976 Governor Brown ann a $10 million commitment to "alternative child care programs in California. This commitment carried (continued p. 9)

with it an articulated concern for "Cost-effective" delivery systems. As legislation for this alternative childcare program was developed, the Childcare Switchboard, Bananas, and the Child Care Information Service in Pasadena advocated strongly that the legislation include some funds for child care information and referral activities across the state. The final legislation (AB 3059 - Foran) included a $900,000 appropriation for child care information, resource and referral agencies. To date, the state has allocated $1,15[illegible]995 to twenty-nine resource and referral centers across the state, The Childcare Switchboard now receives a portion of its funds from the state. These funds are part of a three year experiment in "alternative child care" which will be independently evaluated by ABT Associates. To date, the resource and referral centers have been one of the most successful aspects of the alternative child care program.[1]

A strong informal network of child care information and referral agencies exists in California and meets regularly in both northern and southern parts of the state. The network includes diverse groups in various stages of program development and delivery. Not all the groups are receiving state funds.

Hopefully, California's child care information and referral example under the alternative child care program can pave the way for expanded state and national commitment to this type of service.

1 For details on $10 Million see: "The Alternative Child Care Program (AB 3059) 1976-77 as viewed by the Governor's Advisory Committee on Child Development Programs" June, 1977
"Alternative Child Care Programs 1976-77 -- A Report to the California Legislature and the Governor" - California State Dept of Education, Sacramento, Nov. 1977.

A very recent and positive indication of forthcoming national focus on child care information and referral is the announcement that the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Human Development Services will cooperate with the Ford Foundation in a major study of the role of child care information and referral throughout the nation, and methods for assisting the improvement of these services in communities throughout the country. The study and project will be conducted by the American Institutes for Research in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It is hoped that this project coupled with California's pioneering efforts in this field will provide the necessary information and experience needed for the Congress to pass legislation which would support the further development and expansion of child care information and referral services.

NOVEMBER, 1976

SPECIAL SURVEY

"WHAT HAPPENS TO PEOPLE WHO CANNOT FIND CHILDCARE?"

The Childcare Research & Evaluation Unit is responsible for providing followup contact with persons who telephone requesting childcare referrals. By re-calling these people through this followup procedure, we are not only giving another supportive service to parents in need of childcare, but we are also documenting if and/or how their need for childcare has been met. Although we attempt to reach most of the average 350 callers who request childcare referrals each month, we are able to followup with an average of 45% of the callers.

During our followup telephone conversations with these callers, we find that an average of 35% do not find childcare. Although the reasons for this are quite varied, it is usually true that this unmet need for childcare will have some impact on the lives of both the parents and their children. We discover that because these parents do not find childcare, they are placed in a situation which is subject to rapid and sometimes debilitating changes.

In order to assess what impact not finding childcare can have on the lives of family members, the Research & Evaluation Unit coordinator developed a special survey of those callers who had phoned the Switchboard for childcare referrals during November, 1976. This survey was conducted during February and March, 1977. A simple random sample of callers was selected from only those callers who were reached through our followup phone contact and who did not find childcare. We asked a special survey question to every other one of these callers, every other day: "Have you experienced any problems because you were not able to find childcare?"

From the total of 32 callers reached through regular followup contact who did

not find childcare, we identified a survey sample of 13 callers (41% of the total). To assess whether this survey sample was representative of all the Switchboard callers who request childcare referrals each month, we compared the two groups for such characteristics as: residential neighborhood, family structure (when possible), ages of childcare and childcare needs. This comparison showed that our survey sample was fairly representative of the total callers. Their residence neighborhoods represented a good cross-section of San Francisco: Sunset, Mission, Excelsior-Outer Mission, OMI, Western Addition, Diamond Heights, Visitacion Valley. There was also one caller from Daly City. Concerning some of the family situations of the callers in the sample, we discovered that one mother was pregnant with her second child and was trying to return to work after the baby was born. One other parent needed childcare for two children, ages 6 months and 3 years. Also, although our Information & Referral phone counselors solicit information about family structures or socio-economic status only when it's relevant to eligibility for childcare programs, we did find that four of our survey sample were single parents, two of whom were also AFDC recipients. Two other callers indicated they were AFDC recipients, making a total of four in the sample which we could identify.

With respect to the unmet childcare needs for all respondents in our survey, 57% of the 13 children needed regular parttime childcare and 43% needed regular fulltime childcare. (NOTE: This greater need for parttime care does not follow the usual trend of the total number of callers each month. Our data indicates that the greatest percentage of callers each month need regular fulltime care for all pre-school age categories.) Ages of the children varied from as young as 3 weeks to a maximum of 5 years. Specifically, there were 1.) 7 infants (43% of all children), 2/3rd's of whom were 6 months or younger; 2.) 5 children 2-3 years old

(36%); 3.) 3 children 4-5 years old (21%). Parental preferences in childcare facilities for our survey sample were also representative of the total sample of callers who requested childcare referrals in November, 1976. For regular fulltime childcare, the majority of callers in our survey preferred center-based care (83%). Parental preferences for regular parttime childcare were divided among in-home babysitting (40% of all parttime preferences), center-based care (40%) and family daycare homes (20%).

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

The respondants in our followup survey indicated that a majority of them - approximately 70% - did experience some problems because they could not find regular childcare. A total of only four callers did not relate having severe problems. However, they did express having some inconvenience caused by not locating childcare services. The fact that they had no severe difficulties may be due to two factors: 1.) three of the parents needed parttime childcare only for short amounts of time. They were therefore in situations which allowed for some flexibility in childcare arrangements; 2.) all four callers had some type of back-up system on which to rely when they did not locate regular childcare services. One should note that single parent families or two parent families where both parents work and/or attend school are not able to "trade-off" childcare responsibilities as readily nor change schedules in the manner of some of our survey respondants. The following narratives will elaborate on the above analysis.

Three of the parents who responded to having no severe problems because they did not find childcare reported that they did not actively pursue a search for such services. Also, they had stopped looking for childcare facilities at the time of

our followup call in February. Again, this was feasible for the reasons noted above. One father needed childcare only one day per week. Luckily, he was able to rearrange his schedule with that of his wife to accomodate their childcare need. One mother in this group of respondants had not experienced any problems when she failed to locate childcare because she did not need the childcare to meet a work or school commitment. Rather, her need for childcare stemmed primarily from her desire to fulfill her 3 year old child's developmental needs (socialization with other children) and to free some of her time for special activities. The one respondant among these three parents who needed regular fulltime childcare did not experience major difficulties only because she could retain her fulltime babysitter while waiting for an opening at a SFUSD Children's Center. One should note, however, that she indicated a preference for center-based childcare for her 3 year old rather than the babysitter.

The remaining parent who did not relate any severe problems since not finding childcare was the only one of the four who did actively pursue a search for childcare. She needed this childcare for her 17 month old only one day per week for 4 hours while she attended school. However, she would have preferred a family daycare home to a babysitter for her infant. Although she could not find a family daycare provider who could take her baby for such a short amount of time, she was able to find an alternative solution. Her hsuband was able to care for the baby when necessary, particularly when she had school responsibilities. One can only imagine the difficulties this mother would experience, however, if she were a single parent with such a young, active child.

In contrast to the above findings, the great majority of our respondants - 9 out of 13 - did experience some major problems because they could not find regular childcare services. All of these respondants actively pursued a childcare search.

However, at the time of our followup contact in February, 6 parents were still looking for childcare and 5 were on waiting lists for childcare. A total of 7 of these 9 respondants needed regular fulltime childcare, and only 2 were looking for regular parttime childcare.

It is possible to identify some noticeable trends in the nature of the problems these 9 parents experienced. One such trend was the difficulty in using relatives as childcare providers. Four respondants were relying solely on relatives for their childcare while they were searching for more stable - and preferred - childcare arrangements. Childcare by relatives is often a transitional service. However, this is not to comment negatively upon the quality of childcare provided by relatives as opposed to childcare facilities, but rather to make note of the sometimes temporary nature of these arrangements.

Three of these four respondants preferred fulltime center-based childcare, and one preferred an evening babysitter. However, in response to our survey question these parents stated that childcare provided by relatives can be a difficult situation. It was often an unreliable and/or short term arrangement. Also, it could be an inconvenience in the relatives' lives, and it would not be permanent when the relatives' plans change. For example, one mother needed regular babysitting each Friday evening while she worked in her father's store. Her husband came home too late from his day job to care for the children. She was unable to hire a babysitter on just the one-evening-a-week basis. Also, the Switchb had few babysitting referrals to offer because she lived in Daly City while our referrals are primarily local. The mother had previously been able to use her two teenaged sisters for childcare on an ad hoc basis, yet this had proved to be too undependable as the sisters were not always avaiable. Also, transportation problems to and from the sisters' home often meant the children had to stay overnight. To

compound these difficulties, one child was ill and needed special attention. The mother would thus have to stay home from work, scramble for a temporary baby-sitter or take the children with her to work!

The other three parents using relatives for their childcare were also looking for other more permanent arrangements. One of them was a single parent who had just given birth to a second child. She had to resume working very soon after the child was born, and she was using a relative to provide childcare during this time. Again, this was only a temporary childcare arrangement. The parent was very worried that she would soon be without any kind of childcare because her relative was returning to school. She was on a waiting list for a publically funded childcare center, yet she was uncertain when space would become available. The center, however, could not care for her infant because of the age eligibility requirements. Arranging a second type of care for the baby - or finding one facility to care for both children, - were other dilemmas which this parent would have to solve. The other two parents using relatives to provide their childcare were also on waiting lists for childcare centers (SFUSD Children's Centers). One of these parents had stopped looking for childcare at the time of our followup call, but she had been on the waiting list for almost a year. While she worked, her four year old was cared for on a fulltime basis by her adult daughter. However, we again found that this childcare arrangement was not stable because the daughter was planning to enroll in school shortly. The situation of the other parent on a SFUSD waiting list was also difficult because she was unable to locate a reliable source of childcare. Her child was too young to be eligible for a Children's Center, yet she had already enrolled him on their waiting list in anticipation of the long wait for an opening. She was working parttime until 2:30 in the afternoon, but she wanted to find a fulltime job or go to school. While she worked, relatives were

caring for her infant - her mother until she (the mother) had to go to her evening job and her brother until she (the parent) got home from work. Again, this parent expressed great anxiety that this childcare arrangement with relatives was not long term. She wanted more reliable fulltime childcare, however, as she told us, "it costs too much".

Another trend in the problems experienced by parents who could not find childcare can be described as a "Catch-22" dilemma: often a parent cannot afford childcare until s/he finds steady employment, but it is difficult to look for a job and to secure one without having some type of childcare lined up. Four respondants in our survey were besieged by this predicament. To illustrate, two parents of infants needed fulltime childcare, However, they stated they could afford only about $50. per month for such services. One of these parents described her problem as precisely this "Catch-22" situation. The other parent was attending school fulltime but would soon be getting a fulltime job. She had only a temporary babysitter parttime for $15. per week, yet felt she could not rely on this person for fulltime childcare once she started working. She stressed her inability to pay for "what childcare costs", yet she also voiced her commitment to finding quality infantcare. Her response to our survey question indicated that "not finding regular childcare will hinder (my) school attendance and future job hunting".

Two other parents were also trapped in the "Catch-22" dilemma. Both were on SFUSD Children's Centers waiting lists and both were AFDC recipients. One of these parents - also a single parent - needed childcare for two children: after school care for her 5 year old and fulltime chare for her youngest child. She found it difficult to look for work since she couldn't afford to hire a babysitter during job interviews. She was hoping that there would be an opening at the Children's Center for her younger child once he was old enough to be eligible.

The last parent in our sample of 13 was experiencing a unique predicament. A single parent looking for full or parttime childcare for her four year old son, she was a childcare worker in a family daycare home which had a special educational component. However, she preferred not to have her child in the same setting where she was working. She had only a temporary childcare arrangement with a friend while she was working and searching for another childcare provider. She was still looking for a permanent childcare facility when we reached her with our followup call in February.

SUMMARY

The responses of parents to our followup survey did give us a quick look at some of the problems and stresses which people experience when they do not find stable childcare arrangements. Respondants indicated that using friends or relatives for their childcare was not a satisfactory solution because it was often unreliable and only temporary. This situation also imposed a burden on the relatives by delaying their future plans and by consuming the time which they would normally have free. Parents also told us that not finding childcare jeapordized their ability to look for and secure regular employment or to continue in an educational program. Also, judging from the parents' assertions that they could afford to pay only a minimal amount per month for childcare services, the long SFUSD Children's Center waiting lists also caused delays in vocational or educational plans. Because other types of childcare were too expensive for these parents, they felt that waiting for a Children's Center opening was their only other alternative.

However, this is merely an overview of the myriad of difficulties which families undergo during such a crisis. It may be true that not finding childcare does not

necessarily have a strong detrimental impact on the lives of parents and their children. This is partly because parents need or desire childcare for many reasons - e.g. a desire to find childcare for the developmental needs of a child as opposed to needing childcare in order to work or attend school. Whether the effects to not finding childcare cause severe problems in the family or merely lead to some inconveniences, the fact remains that a reliable, quality childcare arrangement does impact upon the individual and family situations of people. In light of this fact, childcare can no longer be considered only as a service for some individuals by choice or need. Childcare must also be recognized as a social utility which can benefit the entire society.